

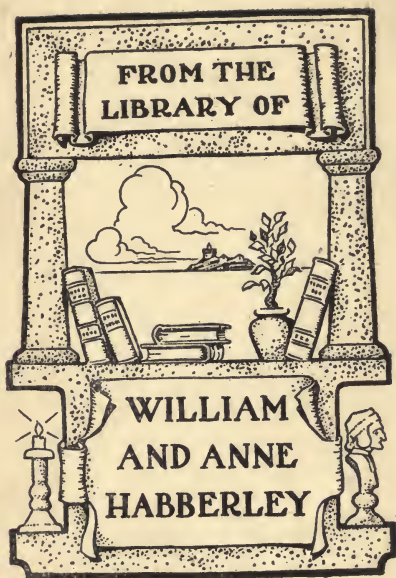
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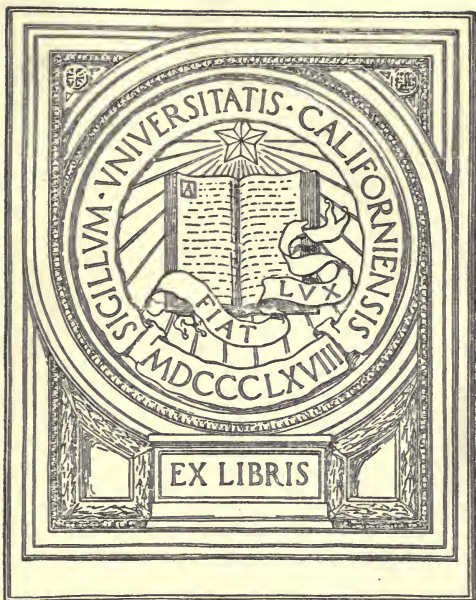
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FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL BOOK,  
BY THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH. WITH  
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Habberley Gift



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**FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL BOOK.**



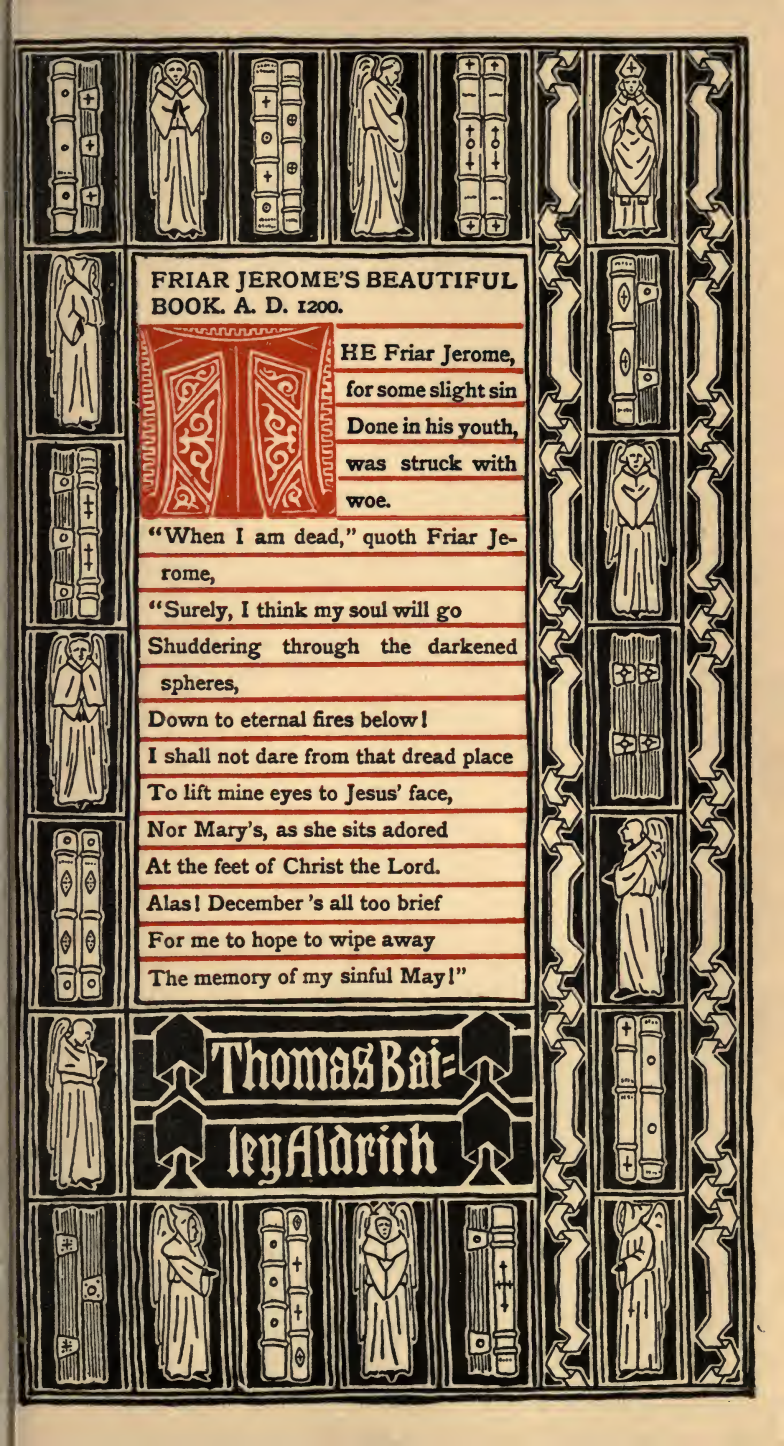





Friar Jerome's  
Beautiful Book







**FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL  
BOOK. A. D. 1200.**



**H**E Friar Jerome,  
for some slight sin  
Done in his youth,  
was struck with  
woe.

"When I am dead," quoth Friar Jerome,

"Surely, I think my soul will go

Shuddering through the darkened  
spheres,

Down to eternal fires below!

I shall not dare from that dread place

To lift mine eyes to Jesus' face,

Nor Mary's, as she sits adored

At the feet of Christ the Lord.

Alas! December's all too brief

For me to hope to wipe away

The memory of my sinful May!"

**Thomas Bai-  
ley Aldrich**





## Friar Jerome's

And Friar Jerome was full of grief  
That April evening, as he lay  
On the straw pallet in his cell.  
He scarcely heard the curfew-bell  
Calling the brotherhood to prayer;  
But he arose, for 't was his care  
Nightly to feed the hungry poor  
That crowded to the Convent door.

**H**IS choicest duty it had been:  
But this one night it weighed him  
"What work for an immortal soul, [down.  
To feed and clothe some lazy clown!  
Is there no action worth my mood,  
No deed of daring, high and pure,  
That shall, when I am dead, endure,  
A well-spring of perpetual good?"

**A**ND straight he thought of those  
great tomes [boast—  
With clamps of gold—the Convent's  
How they endured, while kings and realms

## Beautiful Book







## Friar Troop's

Past into darkness and were lost ;  
How they had stood from age to age,  
Clad in their yellow vellum-mail,  
'Gainst which the Paynim's godless rage,  
The Vandal's fire, could naught avail :  
Though heathen sword-blows fell like hail,  
Though cities ran with Christian blood,  
Imperishable they had stood !  
They did not seem like books to him,  
But Heroes, Martyrs, Saints — themselves  
The things they told of, not mere books  
Ranged grimly on the oaken shelves.

**A** O those dim alcoves, far withdrawn,  
He turned with measured steps and  
Trimming his lantern as he went ; [slow,  
And there, among the shadows, bent  
Above one ponderous folio,  
With whose miraculous text were blent  
Seraphic faces : Angels, crowned  
With rings of melting amethyst ;  
Mute, patient Martyrs, cruelly bound

## Beautiful Book



## Friar Jerome's

To blazing fagots; here and there,  
Some bold, serene Evangelist,  
Or Mary in her sunny hair;  
And here and there from out the words  
A brilliant tropic bird took flight;  
And through the margins many a vine  
Went wandering—roses, red and white,  
Tulip, wind-flower, and columbine  
Blossomed. To his believing mind  
These things were real, and the wind,  
Blown through the mullioned window, took  
Scent from the lilies in the book.

“**S**ANTA Maria!” cried Friar Jerome,  
“Whatever man illumined this,  
Though he were steeped heart-deep in sin,  
Was worthy of unending bliss,  
And no doubt hath it! Ah! dear Lord,  
Might I so beautify Thy Word!  
What sacristan, the convents through,  
Transcribes with such precision? who  
Does such initials as I do?”

## Beautiful Book





## Friar Jerome's

Lo! I will gird me to this work,  
And save me, ere the one chance slips.  
On smooth, clean parchment I 'll engross  
The Prophet's fell Apocalypse;  
And as I write from day to day,  
Perchance my sins will pass away."

**S**O Friar Jerome began his Book.  
From break of dawn till curfew-chime  
He bent above the lengthening page,  
Like some rapt poet o'er his rhyme.  
He scarcely paused to tell his beads,  
Except at night; and then he lay  
And tost, unrestful, on the straw,  
Impatient for the coming day—  
Working like one who feels, perchance,  
That, ere the longed-for goal be won,  
Ere Beauty bare her perfect breast,  
Black Death may pluck him from the sun.  
At intervals the busy brook,  
Turning the mill-wheel, caught his ear;  
And through the grating of the cell

## Beautiful Book



## Friar Jerome's

He saw the honeysuckles peer,  
And knew 't was summer, that the sheep  
In fragrant pastures lay asleep,  
And felt that, somehow, God was near.  
In his green pulpit on the elm,  
The robin, abbot of that wood,  
Held forth by times; and Friar Jerome  
Listened, and smiled, and understood.

**W**HILE summer wrapt the blissful  
What joy it was to labor so, [land  
To see the long-tressed Angels grow  
Beneath the cunning of his hand,  
Vignette and tail-piece subtly wrought!  
And little recked he of the poor  
That missed him at the Convent door;  
Or, thinking of them, put the thought  
Aside. "I feed the souls of men  
Henceforth, and not their bodies!"—yet  
Their sharp, pinched features, now and then,  
Stole in between him and his Book,  
And filled him with a vague regret.

## Beautiful Book



## Friar Trowp's

**N**OW on that region fell a blight :  
The corn grew cankered in its sheath ;  
And from the verdurous uplands rolled  
A sultry vapor fraught with death —  
A poisonous mist, that, like a pall,  
Hung black and stagnant over all.  
Then came the sickness — the malign,  
Green-spotted terror called the Pest,  
That took the light from loving eyes,  
And made the young bride's gentle breast  
A fatal pillow. Ah ! the woe,  
The crime, the madness that befell !  
In one short night that vale became  
More foul than Dante's inmost hell.  
Men curst their wives ; and mothers left  
Their nursing babes alone to die,  
And wantoned, singing, through the streets,  
With shameless brow and frenzied eye ;  
And senseless clowns, not fearing God —  
Such power the spotted fever had —  
Razed Cragwood Castle on the hill,  
Pillaged the wine-bins, and went mad.

Beautiful Book



## Friar Jerome's

And evermore that dreadful pall  
Of mist hung stagnant over all:  
By day, a sickly light broke through  
The heated fog, on town and field;  
By night, the moon, in anger, turned  
Against the earth its mottled shield.

**W**HEN from the Convent, two and two,  
The Prior chanting at their head,  
The monks went forth to shrive the sick,  
And give the hungry grave its dead—  
Only Jerome, he went not forth,  
But hiding in his dusty nook,  
“Let come what will, I must illumine  
The last ten pages of my Book!”  
He drew his stool before the desk,  
And sat him down, distraught and wan,  
To paint his daring masterpiece,  
The stately figure of Saint John.  
He sketched the head with pious care,  
Laid in the tint, when, powers of Grace!  
He found a grinning Death's-head there,

## Beautiful Book





## Friar Trowp's

And not the grand Apostle's face!

**A**HEN up he rose with one long cry :  
" 'Tis Satan's self does this," cried

"Because I shut and barred my heart [he,

When Thou didst loudest call to me!

O Lord, Thou know'st the thoughts of men,

Thou know'st that I did yearn to make

Thy Word more lovely to the eyes

Of sinful souls, for Christ his sake!

Nathless, I leave the task undone :

I give up all to follow Thee—

Even like him who gave his nets

To winds and waves by Galilee!"

**W**HICH said, he closed the precious  
Book

In silence, with a reverent hand ;

And drawing his cowl about his face

Went forth into the Stricken Land.

And there was joy in heaven that day—

More joy o'er this forlorn old friar

## Beautiful Book



## Friar Jerome's

Than over fifty sinless men  
Who never struggled with desire!

**W**HAT deeds he did in that dark town,  
What hearts he soothed with an-  
guish torn,

What weary ways of woe he trod,  
Are written in the Book of God,  
And shall be read at Judgment Morn.

The weeks crept on, when, one still day,  
God's awful presence filled the sky,  
And that black vapor floated by,  
And lo! the sickness past away.

With silvery clang, by thorp and town,  
The bells made merry in their spires:

O God! to think the Pest is flown!

Men kissed each other on the street,  
And music piped to dancing feet  
The livelong night, by roaring fires!

**A**THEN Friar Jerome, a wasted shape—  
For he had taken the Plague at last

## Beautiful Book



## Friar Jpromp's

Rose up, and through the happy town,  
And through the wintry woodlands, past  
Into the Convent. What a gloom  
Sat brooding in each desolate room!  
What silence in the corridor!  
For of that long, innumerable train  
Which issued forth a month before  
Scarce twenty had come back again!

**C**OUNTING his rosary step by step,  
With a forlorn and vacant air,  
Like some unshriven churchyard thing,  
The Friar crawled up the mouldy stair  
To his damp cell, that he might look  
Once more on his beloved Book.

**A**ND there it lay upon the stand,  
Open!—he had not left it so.  
He grasped it, with a cry; for, lo!  
He saw that some angelic hand,  
While he was gone, had finished it!  
There 't was complete, as he had planned;

## Beautiful Book



There, at the end, stood **FINIS**, writ  
 And gilded as no man could do—  
 Not even that pious anchoret,  
 Bilfrid, the wonderful, nor yet  
 The miniatore Ethelwold,  
 Nor Durham's Bishop, who of old  
 (England still hoards the priceless  
 leaves)  
 Did the Four Gospels all in gold.  
 And Friar Jerome nor spoke nor stirred,  
 But, with his eyes fixed on that word,  
 He passed from sin and want and scorn;  
 And suddenly the chapel-bells  
 Rang in the holy Christmas-Morn!



**I**N THOSE WILD WARS WHICH  
 RACKED THE LAND || SINCE  
 THEN, AND KINGDOMS RENT IN  
 TWAIN, || THE FRIAR'S BEAUTIFUL  
 BOOK WAS LOST— || THAT MIRACLE  
 OF HAND AND BRAIN: || YET, THOUGH  
 ITS LEAVES WERE TORN AND TOST,  
 || THE VOLUME WAS NOT WRIT IN  
 VAIN!











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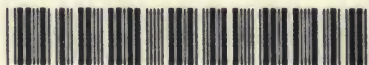
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